

A well-loved Birmingham nature reserve acknowledged by JR Tolkien as the inspiration behind the mystical Old Forest in his world famous novels *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, has won a £376,500 grant* from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The project, which will be undertaken by The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, hopes to both restore Moseley Bog and Joy's Wood Local Nature Reserve as a green space of exceptional heritage significance, improving access for people of all abilities to experience and enjoy. Many years of decline – the site was once destined for a fate as a landfill site – will now be reversed with a comprehensive conservation management plan of its key heritage features and biodiversity.

The site was renamed in 2000 after urban conservation campaigner Joy Fifer worked tirelessly in the 1980's on the 'Save Our Bog' campaign to save the site from development and is now a Local Nature Reserve and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. It is home to a rich diversity of habitats, including the bog itself, various dry woodlands and a high number of species including birds, invertebrates and small mammals. In addition, the site also has important cultural and archaeological significance including two Bronze Age burnt mounds with Scheduled Ancient Monument status, and a former mill pool dam, a pond and a former water mill.

The announcement coincides with this years' International Year of Biodiversity and will delight locals who use the area as part of a well loved wildlife corridor in South Birmingham running from Woodgate Valley to Kings Heath.

Katie Foster, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands committee said:

“We are delighted to play a major part in safeguarding and improving an area beloved by so many people in the region - and connected with such a well known writer whose childhood heritage here influenced his writing now known worldwide. It is good to know how much pleasure Lottery players money will bring to so many people, whether that be through volunteering or simply enjoying the wonderful natural habitat that Moseley Bog offers.”

Works will include hedgerow restoration, meadow management, and tree safety, as well as improvements to boardwalks, steps, pathways, and signage around the site.

Opportunities will be available for volunteers to become involved in the project, and members of the Moseley Bog Conservation Group will play a key role. Interpretation at the site will also be improved, and a range of learning materials including resource packs and an outreach programme for schools and community groups, a website, and self guided MP3 tours, will be produced.

Neil Wyatt, Chief Executive of The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, said:

“On the day our application for funding went to the HLF I was here, and saw two buzzards circling low overhead – here in the heart of the city. This is a remarkable reserve on its own merit, yet this place means so much to so many people, in so many different ways. It inspired Tolkien, and it has inspired local people to stand up for their local greenspaces across the country. Now, finally, all the effort of the local community to protect and look after Moseley Bog and Joy’s Wood will be rewarded. This is one of the UK’s most important urban nature reserves, and we are so grateful for the support it is to receive.”

Bob Blackham, leader of the volunteers of Moseley Bog, and widely recognised JR Tolkien expert, said:

“Moseley Bog has been affected and changed by human activity for at least the last 3000 years as can be seen by the Bronze Age burnt mounds, the medieval earthworks of the dam and the remains of the Victorian/Edwardian gardens. Nature has always repaired and restored the works of man but for the last 13 years the Bog has been helped by the Moseley Bog Volunteers, without whom this project would not be possible.”

Roger Owen, Natural England’s Regional Director for the West Midlands, said:

“The Natural Assets programme, funded by Advantage West Midlands and delivered in partnership by Natural England, is pleased to be supporting the project at Moseley Bog and Joy’s Wood. The site will be transformed into Tolkien’s Nature Reserve becoming a high quality natural asset with access for all. The enhanced site will be a place for informal recreation, as well as practical volunteering involvement for the local community, an outdoor classroom for

local schools and a tourist attraction bringing economic benefit to the region.”

There will also be new initiatives to encourage first-time visitors to the nature reserve, in addition to the Tolkien Weekend and Dawn Chorus Day which are becoming very popular. A new open air performance and education space will be created, which it is hoped will become a hub for community events and courses.